



Van Leer
FOUNDATION

Green & Blue Schoolyards

Cool Schools Rotterdam
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The Van Leer Foundation

Giving all children a good start in life sets the foundation for inclusive societies. We work globally to improve the wellbeing of babies, toddlers and their caregivers.

We provide investment and knowledge to help leaders develop and scale effective policies and services with a focus on the period from pregnancy to age 5.



“All children should be able to achieve the greatest possible realisation of their innate potential.”

– Oscar van Leer



Early experiences shape the brain – and the future



Brain building

One million synapses are created in a baby's brain every second.

The way these connections form sets the foundation for good health, learning in later childhood and adulthood.



Scale of the problem

250 million children under 5 – across almost every country in the world – do not receive the care they need to reach their full potential.



The potential

USD 6.40– 17.60: estimated return for every USD 1 spent on high-quality early years programmes.

Trust.

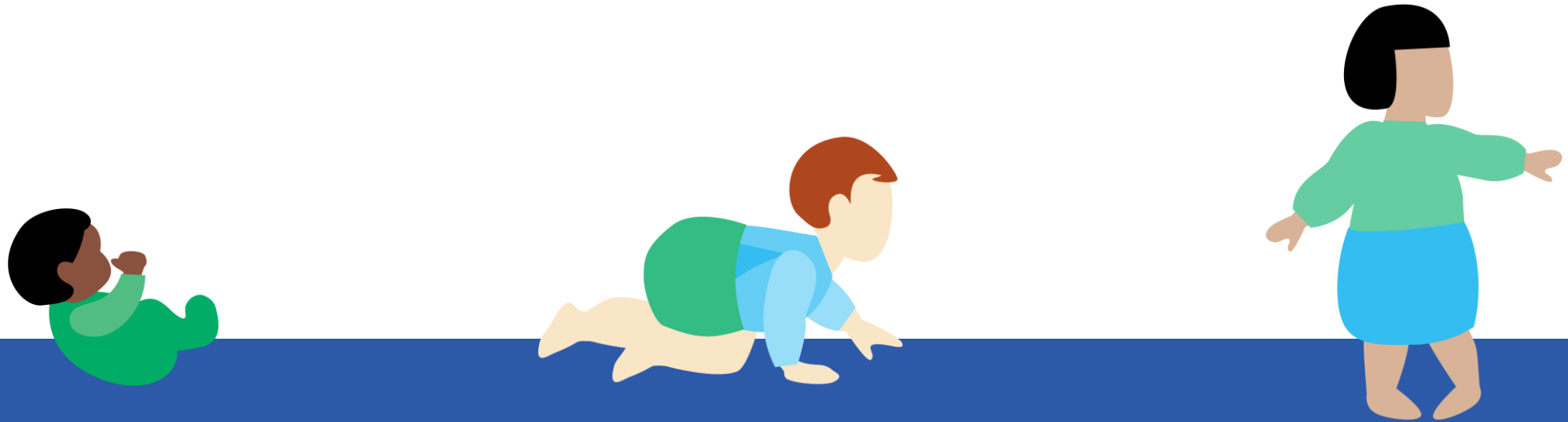
Our earliest experiences shape the parts of our brain we use when we trust and connect with other people.

Fairness.

Investing in early childhood development reduces gaps in health, education and income throughout the lifespan.

Connection.

Focusing on the needs of young children brings leadership together from across the social and political spectrum.



**A good start for all children
is the foundation of an inclusive society**



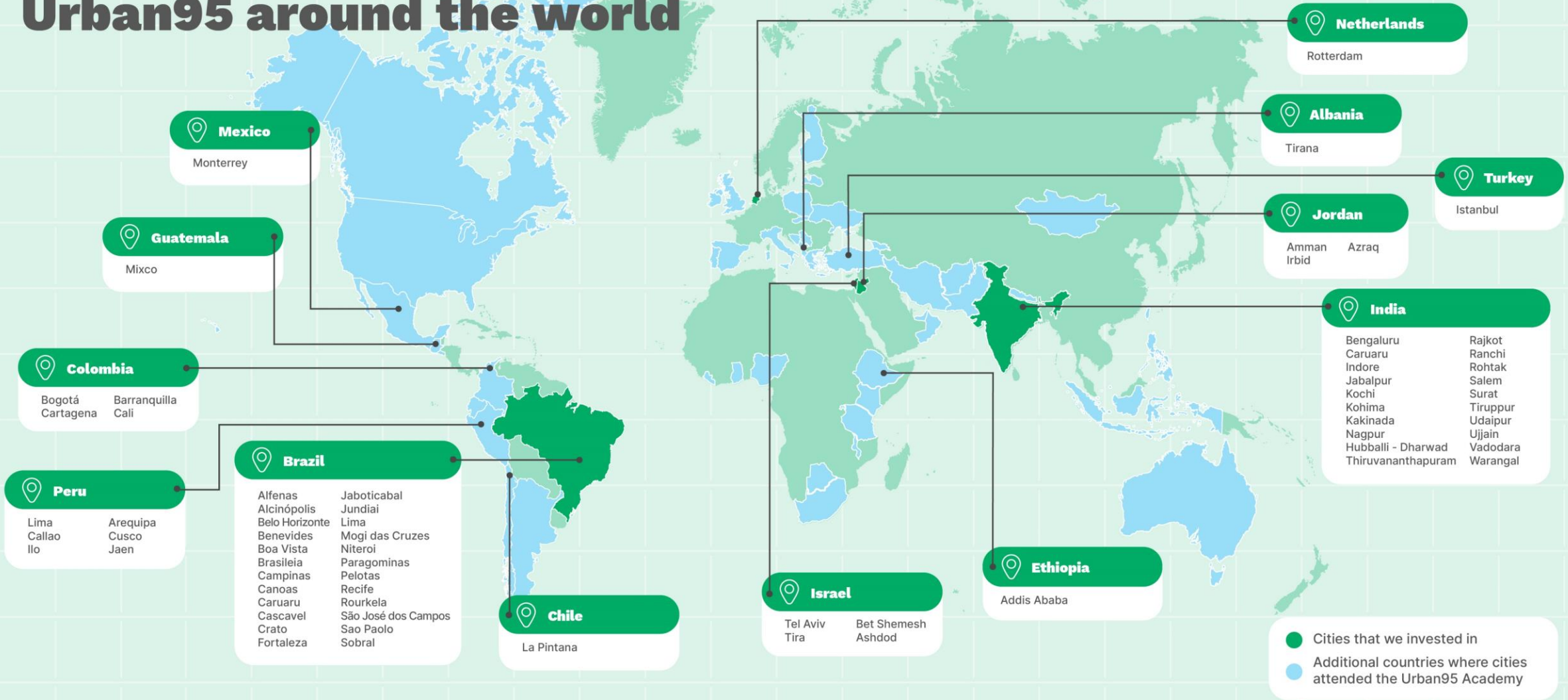
Cities

If you could experience your city from 95cm – the perspective of a toddler...

What would you change?



Urban95 around the world



Why we Invest in Nature for Children

Regular exposure to nature:

- Improves **physical health** by encouraging outdoor play, physical activity, and motor skill development.
- Impacts **mental health** by reducing stress, anxiety, and promoting overall well-being
- Fosters **learning** through curiosity, creativity, and exploration with natural elements and peers in outdoor settings
- Sets a strong foundation for **a lifelong connection with the natural world** and supports their overall development.

Source: Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University



“Nature is a tool to get children to experience not just the wider world, but themselves”
- Stephen Moss



Green & Blue Schoolyards In the Netherlands

Green Blue Schoolyards is a subsidy and technical support programme by the city of Rotterdam.

It sits at the intersection of several strategies: child-friendliness, urban greening and climate adaptation.

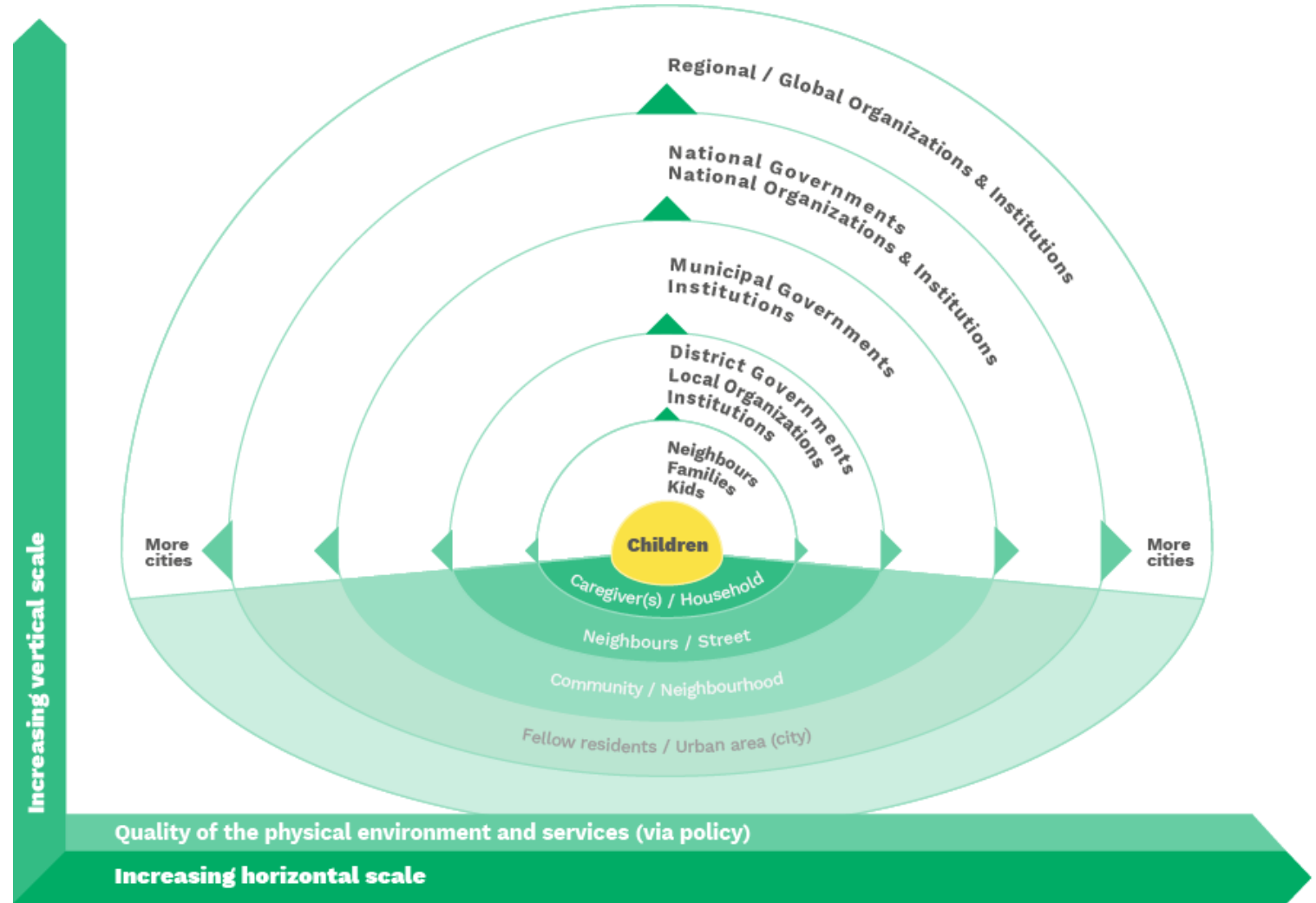
It aims to increase the number of green spaces (such as parks) and blue spaces (such as lakes, canals or waterfronts) to **support families living in neighbourhoods with few attractive natural play opportunities.**



Scaling ideas

The core of our approach is to scale the projects with the greatest potential, those that can improve the lives of the greatest number of infants, toddlers and caregivers.

We saw huge opportunities in scaling Green Blue Schoolyards globally.

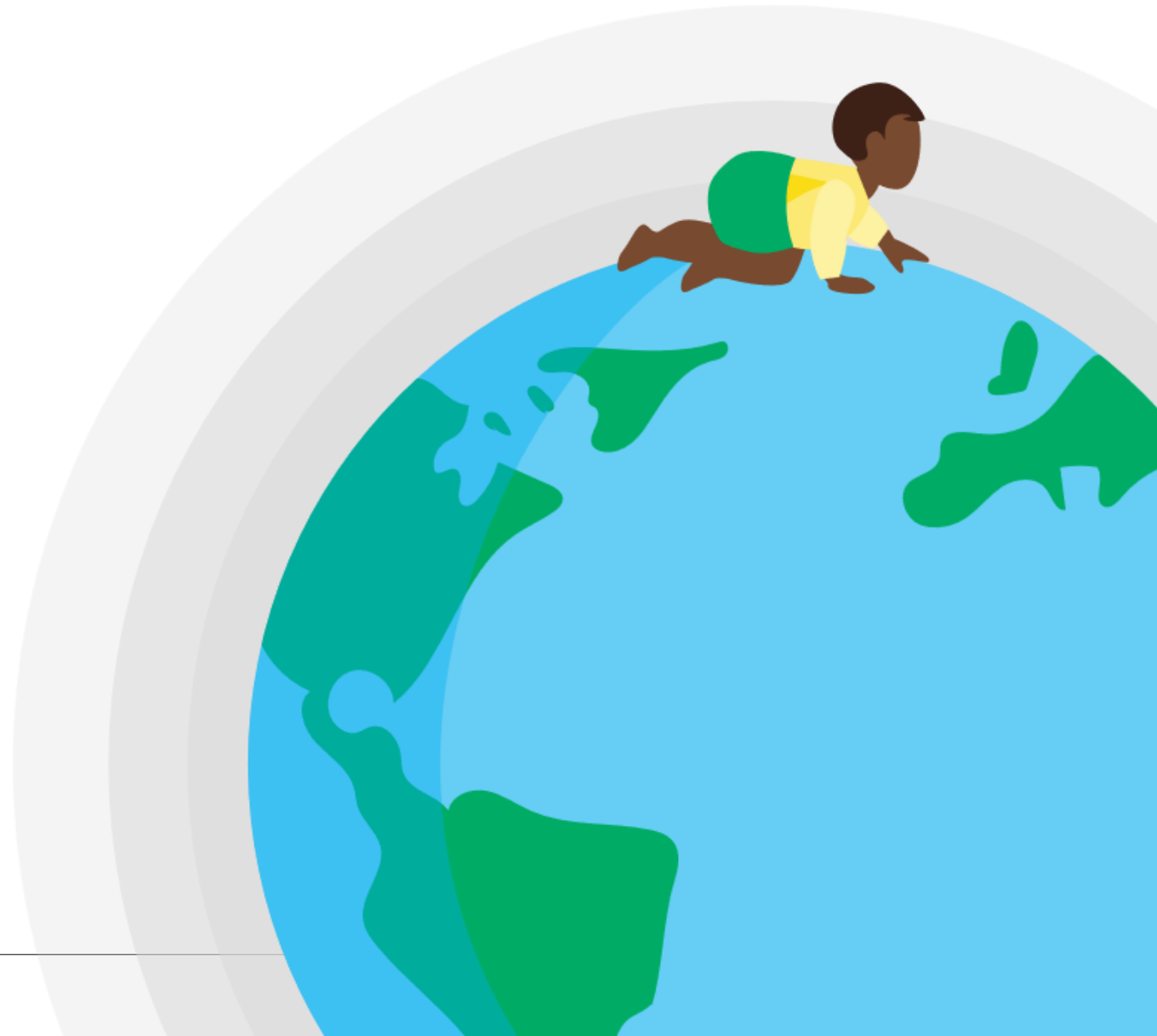


A global study tour

We bought urban practitioners from Brazil, Ethiopia, Israel, India and the US to Rotterdam for a global study tour in June 2023 to scale up the model.

The focus of the 3-day learning journey was to discover how quality Green and Blue Schoolyards (GBSY) and play spaces are a **lever to achieve health, education, climate and social objectives for families at the neighbourhood level.**

This is true specially in disadvantaged neighbourhoods, if schoolyards are open to the public.





Study Tour Workbook
**Green and Blue
Schoolyards**



Bernard
van Leer
FOUNDATION

ivn natuur
educatie

FRISSEBLIKKEN
wij zijn de nieuwe generatie

Core learning topics

Design

What and where to develop? What are the characteristics of the school and environment.

Collaboration

Multistakeholder process: who are the stakeholders and how to engagement them.

Policy embedding

Which policies are in place? How to align with opportunities and challenges.

Judicial implications

What legal considerations to take into account.

Finance

What are the costs and how to secure funding.



Zoom in on Finance

Identifying funding sources:

- **Government support**
Check for funding available from your local municipality.
- **Sponsorship**
Businesses, local organisations or community groups could sponsor development
- **Applying for grants**
Philanthropic organisations may provide grants in your region.
- **Fundraising**
Organise local school and community activities to raise money.
- **Own resources**
Review what resources may already be available.
- **Contributions in kind**
Explore non-financial help, for example by contacting a garden centre.



Zoom in on Policy

Green and blue schoolyards can help achieve multiple policy objectives:

- **Climate policies**
GBSYs offer an implementation tool for improving climate adaptation such as improved storm water drainage and reduced heat island effects.
- **Health policies**
GBSYs compliment health policies and provide positive health benefits including more active lifestyles and improved air quality.
- **Education policies**
GBSYs can enrich educational offerings in schools. They also improve children's attention and teacher wellbeing.
- **Inclusion policies**
GBSYs can be placed in neighbourhoods that lack access to nature-filled outdoor space improving spatial equity in the city.



Explore the virtual study tour

Step into the magical De Vlinder green and blue schoolyards and learn from 3 perspectives: families, teachers and city officials.

Look around in 360 and discover how transforming a schoolyard can transform the health and wellbeing of a whole neighbourhood.



SCAN ME



Global Impact



Naturalized Parks

Pelotas, Brazil



Naturalised Parks Tel Aviv, Israel



Nature in Nurturing Neighbourhoods Jabalpur, India



Next steps

Scale & Sustainability

We are supporting IVN to develop a National Schoolyards Foundation/Fund in the Netherlands.

IVN will lead its establishment and implementation, with various stakeholders expressing interest, including provinces, the national government, and foundations like the Postcode Lottery.

The fund aims to complement existing resources rather than replacing local government funding.

In addition, the fund will provide an infrastructure to promote and monitor quality and impact, introducing a tiered quality framework and citizen science monitoring tool.



Thank you!

